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Viewing cable 06DAMASCUS392, AN ALAWITE-SUNNI CHAT ON KHADDAM, FUTURE OF REGIME

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g.

#06DAMASCUS392.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DAMASCUS392	2006-02-02 15:08	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Damascus

Appears in these articles:

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6841
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0608

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000392

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SUBJECT: AN ALAWITE-SUNNI CHAT ON KHADDAM, FUTURE OF REGIME

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche, per 1.4 b,d.

11. (C) The criticisms and maneuvering of former VP Khaddam continue to generate intense private discussion in Syria. According to Sunni politician XXXXXXXXXXXX on January 30, a retired senior Alawite military officer privately endorsed Khaddam's views and noted fears that he and other former Alawite security officers might be arrested for sympathizing or conspiring with Khaddam. This officer pressed XXXXXXXXXXXX to find out if the U.S. wanted to get rid of Bashar al-Asad or preferred to maintain his minority regime in Syria. Separately, XXXXXXXXXXXX touched briefly on the political strength of recently released detainee Riad Seif and on the potential political power of the Muslim Brotherhood. End Summary.

12. (C) A SUNNI-ALAWITE CHAT: Sunni politician XXXXXXXXXXXX recounted for Polchief January 30 a discussion he had earlier in the day with XXXXXXXXXXXX, an Alawite who served as a former senior Syrian army officer XXXXXXXXXXXX and still maintained close contact with former SMI head XXXXXXXXXXXX, considered the most influential of retired Alawite military officers in Syria. XXXXXXXXXXXX told XXXXXXXXXXXX he had come on behalf of XXXXXXXXXXXX, whom he had seen at lunch the day before. (Note: According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXXXXXX was Ghazi Kana'an's chief deputy in Lebanon for several years.)

13. (C) ALAWITE ENDORSEMENT OF KHADDAM: XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX discussed the implications of the press campaign launched by former VP Khaddam in Paris. XXXXXXXXXXXX had described Khaddam as "my friend" and noted somewhat cryptically that "he is depending on us." XXXXXXXXXXXX had also noted that when he and other former (Alawite) security officials like XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX, and XXXXXXXXXXXX and others got together, they talked about "the same problems, in the same tone," that Khaddam had used. These included Bashar al-Asad's mistakes in Lebanon, his mistakes in handling internal affairs in Syria, his misguided rapprochement with Iran, as well as his ill-advised embrace of Hamas leader Khalid Misha'al. XXXXXXXXXXXX described XXXXXXXXXXXX as angry about Bashar's mistakes.

14. (C) KHADDAM'S LAST NIGHT IN SYRIA: XXXXXXXXXXXX told XXXXXXXXXXXX that Khaddam had spent one of his last nights in Syria playing cards and discussing the situation with XXXXXXXXXXXX, who now fears that the regime is lying in wait for him. XXXXXXXXXXXX said he thought Khaddam had contacted XXXXXXXXXXXX by phone in late January. XXXXXXXXXXXX had reached out to XXXXXXXXXXXX and asked him, XXXXXXXXXXXX and XXXXXXXXXXXX to stand behind him if the regime tried to move against him, reported XXXXXXXXXXXX. In XXXXXXXXXXXX view, Khaddam is planning more steps. XXXXXXXXXXXX described Khaddam's actions as a conspiracy against the regime.

15. (C) BASHAR'S POPULARITY AMONG ALAWITES: XXXXXXXXXXXX told XXXXXXXXXXXX that Asad was not popular at all among most Alawites, most of whom remain mired in poverty. He had also probed XXXXXXXXXXXX about whether the U.S. wanted to maintain the Alawites in power as a minority regime and if it had objections to a Sunni regime in Syria, which in his view would provide more stability. He had also noted that the Israelis wanted a minority regime. XXXXXXXXXXXX said he countered that in his view the Americans did not favor continued rule by the Alawites, given Washington's support for democratization. Both men had agreed that it would be impossible for an Alawite to become President of Syria after Bashar al-Asad, who had arrived to power under unique circumstances.

16. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX IMPRESSIONS OF XXXXXXXXXXXX: XXXXXXXXXXXX noted to Polchief that XXXXXXXXXXXX had wanted to convey his fear that the regime might try to imprison him because of his contacts with Khaddam. Further, he had wanted to convey that "we are not with the President," said XXXXXXXXXXXX. XXXXXXXXXXXX also wanted XXXXXXXXXXXX to try to determine whether the Americans wanted Bashar to continue in power or not. XXXXXXXXXXXX had expressed concern that Khaddam was not accepted by the U.S. and at one point had complained that it seemed that the U.S. wanted Bashar to continue.

17. (C) RIAD SEIF; MUSLIM BROTHERS: On other subjects, XXXXXXXXXXXX described recently released Damascus Spring detainee Riad Seif as a good man and as someone XXXXXXXXXXXX could work with, but noted that his political support beyond the elite level was very thin. According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, there is still a strong perception that Seif is a leftist, which would hurt him with conservative religious people in Syria, the vast majority. On a separate issue, XXXXXXXXXXXX noted that an Islamist

political movement in Syria led by the Muslim Brothers or some like-minded group would not have more than 10-20 percent support in Syria (see septel for a fuller discussion of his and others views on this subject.)

18. (C) COMMENT: Although XXXXXXXXXXXX is one of our more reliable political contacts, it is still a bit difficult to know what to make of his conversation with XXXXXXXXXXXX. It does seem to reveal some of the nervous fissures that Khaddam's press antics and maneuvering have opened up, at least on the outer fringes of the regime. XXXXXXXXXXXX continues to nurse grander political ambitions, seeing himself as a conservative but broad-minded Sunni (and prominent businessman) with long-standing support in minority communities like the Alawites, Christians, and Kurds. XXXXXXXXXXXX has created family ties and affiliations over the years that have helped him nurture special relations with senior Alawite regime figures, especially in the security services, even when his opposition politics led him to criticize the regime and call for change. These affiliations also probably kept him out of prison over the years. He is a harsh critic of Bashar and has refused repeated entreaties to meet with him since the young Asad took power. XXXXXXXXXXXX assessed that the internal situation in Syria remained stable and the regime was weakened but still in control, with "outside permission" to remain in power.

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